

Global and Local Issues in (Agro) Biodiversity*

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Mr. Chairman, Ladies and gentlemen:

It is a great pleasure to address this meeting on behalf of United Nations Environment Programme, the implementing agency of PLEC

Please, let me take back a bit and recollect how the issue of biodiversity has changed over the last 30 years or even during the last 15 years: Through the last three – four decades both the environment as a general issue and the loss of biological diversity more particularly have grown in their specificity. Biological diversity issue is so comprehensive, now covering:

1. Species and genotypes,
2. Loss of both above ground and soil biodiversity,
3. Terrestrial and aquatic biodiversity,
4. Agro – and forest biodiversity,
5. Biological safety and biotechnology,
6. Dangers related to genome manipulations,
7. Introduction of alien species,
8. Loss of useful insects, etc.

Discussion has shifted from protected areas and ex – situ stocks to protection of biological diversity on farmers fields and in resource users real production environment. Discussion now is also on ecosystems and not only on the species and/or genotypes themselves; and as of late it is not only the scientific knowledge, which is given credit, but there is an ever stronger voice demanding recognition for the indigenous and contemporary local knowledge on local agrobiodiversity materials and their uses.

Agricultural Biodiversity

For some time there has been a world – wide reorientation towards sustainable agriculture, which balances production and conservation in such a way as to meet the needs of expanding populations while maintaining ecological balance. The paradigm of sustainable development seeks to develop strategies and tools to respond to five broad requirements:

1. Integration of conservation and development
2. Satisfaction of basic human needs
3. Achievement of equity and social justice
4. Provision of social self – determination and cultural diversity and
5. Maintenance of ecological integrity.

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The challenges are so strongly interrelated that it is difficult and unhelpful to try to arrange them in hierarchical order. Each is a goal itself and a prerequisite to the achievement of the others. Agricultural biodiversity contain the most vital elements of biological diversity essential for food and livelihood security. Also, as part of the biodiversity relevant to agriculture more emphasis is put on soil micro – organisms and to address all soil biota. From a global perspective this soil biodiversity (living and dead organic matter) is very important also as carbon stock and subsequently to climate change.

PLEC History

It is now almost four years ago when the implementation of PLEC started with GEF funding. What was PLEC supposed to do, and how has it contributed to overall issue of biodiversity?

PLEC was to provide inputs to the global dialogue on AGRODIVERSITY: agricultural biodiversity and its management

As an international collaborative demonstration project on agro – biodiversity / agrodiversity involving scientists, farmers, extension staff and students in five clusters of countries over the three continents Africa, Asia and South America, PLEC's goal was to develop with farmers sustainable resource use and biodiversity conservation strategies within agricultural systems, aiming to obtain results that are replicable.

1. It was to learn from and document the ways in which small farmers in these regions use their resources to manage diversity in their ecosystems.
2. PLEC was to bring the knowledge, technologies and skills of farmers together with scientific knowledge.
3. Through demonstration process PLEC was to come up with further results that are replicable in other ecosystems, and which could form a basis for policy development and implementation.
4. The Cluster demonstration areas chosen around the world represent a diversity of ecosystems, many of which are under threat. They include forest areas, uplands and mountains, freshwater wetlands and semi – arid areas.
5. It was also to achieve capacity development through training, networks, discussion groups, sub – cluster and cluster.

What Has Been Accomplished by PLEC

Globally in different participating countries PLEC has achieved: besides the numerous reports, publications (and other outreach messages and outputs), a great number of trained persons etc. PLEC has made considerable advances in: (1) changing perception of politicians (who realising farmers' knowledge, now more readily talk to them); (2) enhanced self – esteem of resource users; (3) Capacity building: converting non – PLEC farmers; (4) Paradigm shift: on how scientists approach farmers and value farmers knowledge and farmer – led methodologies; farmers' own increased valuation of the biodiversity around them and recognition of its importance.

This new emphasis on and appreciation of the knowledge of resource users on biological diversity at their disposal and its management (utilisation and conservation) has contributed and made an impact on the global agro – biodiversity dialogue, as well. Agricultural biodiversity is a recognised part of both Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and Global Environment Facility (GEF).

Multi – functionality and dynamism of small holder systems is achieving due recognition: Agrodiversity is recognised as means in the service of small holder in the face of global change

Furthermore, we all have learned more of the complexity and inter – dependence of biodiversity and management diversity

One further achievement is dissemination and adoption of sustainable technologies through Networking inter – cluster and intra – cluster, inter – site and intra – site (farmer to farmer) participants / stakeholders PLEC.

Concluding Remarks

In terms of biological diversity we are closer to the concept of 'conservation with equity' which was discussed already in 1986. It will, however, take still quite a while before these grand concepts are a fact of life and everyday reality everywhere. Still more negotiation, bargaining and fine tuning of approaches will be needed before a man or a community in a rainforest and/or in the fringes of deserts will have a right to and an equitable share of proceeds deriving from the biological diversity he/she/they have managed: maintained, developed and adapted throughout centuries.

Finally, now looking back to the long preparatory GEF – phase of PLEC (since 1994) I ask you and myself: "was it worth it?" For my part and for UNEP I can answer: absolutely YES. PLEC has made a difference on environment and biodiversity conservation at grassroots, at resource users level and in changing thinking of politicians, technicians, and scientists – and all of us. **AND THAT IS WHAT MATTERS!**

I am sure I'll hear more of PLEC's successful enterprise here in Yunnan China. I wish you a successful meeting and good future for PLEC.

Thank you.